

**ACELC Free Conference**  
**Christ for Us: The Order of Creation**  
**Marriage and the Family**  
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I have been asked to talk about marriage and the family. I could reminisce about my childhood or my marriage. I grew up in a family with ten children. My wife and I raised a family of twelve children. I could look back at my experience and on the basis of it try to distill some wisdom to share with you today.

But nobody's experience is normative for others. There has to be something more solid than that. Besides, raising children is not something you can teach others to do the way we can teach algebra, English, history, or music. I once knew a fellow – he was a parochial schoolteacher – who liked to opine that parents should be required to take classes on how to be parents. The idea that raising children is a skill that can be taught in a classroom could only come from someone who believes that the educationist methods courses taught in teacher training colleges prepare one for the classroom. Being a parent isn't a skill. It goes much deeper than that. Marriage and the family are God's creation. We are participants in it. That doesn't put us in charge of it. It certainly doesn't enable us to govern it in such a way that we can determine what the outcome is going to be.

“How to” manuals on marriage and “parenting” miss the point. They don't reckon with what God did. Consider the use of the word “parent” as a verb. “Parenting” is something either men or women can do. But what is it? Is it being a father? Is it being a mother? But a woman cannot be a father and a man cannot be a mother. There is what a mother does and there is what a father does. What, then, is parenting? Unless you can merge a man into a woman or a woman into a man, I don't think you can answer this question.

Perhaps you would like a rulebook to follow. But that also misses the point. Rules may be helpful insofar as they express God's law that governs marriage and the family. Children should honor their parents, fathers should be patient with their children, wives should respect their husbands, husbands should be kind to their wives, and so forth. These principles can be arranged in a logical and coherent system of rules one can learn and attempt to follow. The problem with such a “how to” approach, however, is that it does not deal with the most important matter, namely that marriage and the family are God's doing.

What God does determines for us what is. Before we can talk about what marriage is, what a family is, how to be a husband or wife, father or mother, or a son or daughter, we need to consider and take to heart what God has done to establish marriage and the family.

This brings us back to Adam and Eve. The historicity of Adam and Eve was considered by the so called moderates during Missouri's battle for the Bible to be irrelevant to the larger issue of the proper distinction between law and gospel. Nothing could be further from the truth. Apart from an historical record of the first marriage and the first family, we cannot understand its foundation. We cannot understand the Fourth Commandment and the Sixth Commandment that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai until we have listened to the word God gave Moses to write about the original creation in the first chapters of Genesis. Creation, not Sinai, is the foundation for marriage.

Creation is the foundation for marriage. Redemption is not and neither is sanctification. Marriage and the family pertain to this life only. Marriage is not a sacrament. It is true that what God created fell and what fell is redeemed and sanctified, so clearly, redemption and sanctification have to do with marriage. We are familiar with the beautiful portion of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians where he compares Christ to the bridegroom and the church to the bride. Christ's relationship to the church and the church's relationship to Christ are icons of the relationship between the husband and wife and the wife and husband. We will see that an understanding of both redemption and sanctification are vital for us if we are to have solid Christian marriages from which Christian children are brought up. But we cannot understand what marriage is and what the family is apart from reckon-

ing soberly and attentively with what God did in the beginning when he made man in his own image, made them male and female, blessed them, and told them to be fruitful.

Historicity matters. We live lives in space and time. We don't bebop around the heavenly realms, looking here and there for the secret to a heavenly marriage. Heavenly marriage isn't between a man and a woman; it's between the Lamb and the heavenly Jerusalem, Christ and his church, and the family in heaven is the children of God born again here on earth. Marriage is not made in heaven. It is made on earth.

When God made man in his own image he made him male and female. The distinction between male and female is essential to what it means to be a human being. One is either a male human being or a female human being. There are no other options, and God is the One who makes the decision. You cannot make it for yourself. When God made man in his own image, made him to know him, love him, and worship him, he made them male and female.

The attack on the distinction between male and female in America and the West has been so thorough and enduring it may be that we conservative, confessional, traditional, evangelical Lutherans have fallen into a weak acquiescence to this assault without being aware of it. The English language and English grammar have been taken captive by an androgynous agenda that wages war against God's order of creation.

We meekly submit to political truisms that are not true and that infect nature itself with a sterile, Godless, and lifeless ideology. The ideology of feminism borrows the word equal and equality from the traditional American political lexicon and materially changes its meaning. In the social and political struggles of Americans to overcome Black slavery and its residual effects on race relations in America, we could appeal to the principle of equality between Blacks and Whites. In theory, in legal, social, and religious matters, a Black man and a White man are interchangeable. Whatever the racial differences may be, when it comes to what makes a man a man there is no difference between a Black man and a White man.

The American doctrine of the equality of the races was brought into service to a new claim: the equality of the sexes. But that's a different matter. The equality of the races presents nothing contrary to the Holy Scriptures. A Christian can embrace this creed with a good conscience. But this creed cannot be applied to the sexes without attacking the teaching of God's word about the sexes. There are two sexes. God made each one. He created Adam and from Adam's side he took a rib and he created Eve. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image. God looked at what he made and saw that it was very good.

God made them male and female. God did it. It was very good. Male does not equal female. Female does not equal male. A Black man and a White man are the same in every essential respect. A Black woman and a White woman are likewise the same. But a man is not the same as a woman and a woman is not the same as a man. They are not equal. God did not make them equal. He made them male and female. He made them in his own image. They knew God, loved God, and worshipped God.

If we believe in racial equality, it stands to reason that we will also favor colorblind policies that treat Black, Brown, Yellow, White, and Red men as interchangeable, not favoring or opposing any individual man on the basis of his race or skin color. If we believe in the equality of the sexes – or of the genders, as people are wont to say these days – we will favor policies that treat men and woman as interchangeable, not favoring a woman for this task or a man for that task, on the basis of sex, that is, gender.

To blur the distinction between a man and a woman requires, first of all, a revision of language. It began about a generation ago with the abandonment of the generic "he" where this pronoun could refer to either a male or a female. For centuries, the male pronoun was used to refer either specifically to males or more generally to men, women, and children. Feminists claimed this reflected a sexist bias. We denied it. We knew that to be called sexist was an accusation, and we did not want to be accused, so we denied that the use of the generic "he" reflected a sexist bias. We were wrong. It did. It was biased toward the opinion that the male stands as the representative of the female. The female does not stand as the representative of the male. This is why we used the generic "he" while there was no generic "she."

God created the man first and then the woman. He took the woman out of the man. The man is the source, the head. Adam – the man – named the animals (Genesis 2:19-20) because God gave him lordship over them. He named his wife “Eve” because she was the mother of all the living. The father/husband gives the mother/wife his name. She identifies with him. She claims her identity in him. He gives his name to her and to the children she bears. They have his name because he represents the family.

Traditionalist, Bible-believing, conservative, Christians rail against the Philistines responsible for the decline of our culture while meekly submitting to their rules. The new rules are ruthlessly imposed. The new rules toss aside English grammar. Patterns of speech are forced into service to the feminist agenda. The third person plural pronoun has replaced the generic “he” and is used to refer back to a third person singular noun. This is against the rules of language, but the rules of language must give way to the feminist agenda.

New words are invented. The word mankind has been replaced by the word humankind. The conservative Roman Catholic culture critic, Rod Dreher, uses the word humankind in his book, *The Benedict Option*. He alternately uses both “she” and “he” as the generic pronoun to refer to a person who may be either male or female. He does this in a book devoted to establishing a Christian culture within our falling civilization. Even the culture warriors succumb to the new rules.

The Kolb/Wengert edition of the Book of Concord, the official translation for both Missouri Synod seminaries, speaks of the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters, adding the reference to sisters, a word that is not in the original, because the new rules forbid using masculine nouns to refer to any group that might or should include women. The new rules have become normative and sacrosanct. Scholars will change established texts rather than challenge the rules.

The adoption of politically correct language to describe men and women is part of the feminist agenda. This agenda is driven by belief in and the need to impose upon others the doctrine of the equality of the sexes. This doctrine disallows patriarchy as a valid order of things. The doctrine of creation taught in the Holy Scriptures, on the other hand, requires patriarchy as the valid order of things. The order of creation is the foundation for Christian marriage and the Christian family. The fatherhood of God is reflected in the fatherhood of fathers. The husband/father’s relationship to the wife/mother is not a social construct, changeable according to the times. When St. Paul explained to Timothy why a woman could not publicly teach in the church, he appealed specifically to the order of creation. When he made the same argument to the Corinthians, he called women preaching a shameful thing. Shameful, because it was a violation of the order God established in creation. It is shameful, because it goes against nature.

The sexual meltdown of recent years features such lunacies as same sex “marriage” and the treatment of gender dysphoria, not as a sin, not as a disorder, not as a mental illness, but as confirmation that one has a civil right to decide for himself what sex or gender he is. The normalization of these and other sexual perversions are all fruit of the poison tree: the doctrine of the equality of the sexes.

The notion of equality is a sterile and spiritless notion. God made woman to be a suitable helper for man. To this we echo the French saying: “Vive la difference!” Thank God we are not equal. The father is not a mother and the mother is not a father. The father is the head. The mother is the center. The children run to the mother. Eve is the mother of all the living. Adam is the man. He is the man for better or for worse. He named the animals, named his wife, ate the forbidden fruit, and brought the whole world into sin and death. “Behold, the man!” There is humanity’s disobedience and death. The blame is laid at the feet of the man, not the woman.

The second Adam brought the whole world back to God. “Behold, the man!” So declared Pontius Pilate shortly before he abdicated his responsibility and handed Jesus over to the will of his enemies. Jesus’ obedience not only replaces Adam’s disobedience, so that the sin and death of Adam have now been replaced by the righteousness and life of Christ; it also confirms Adam’s headship. The office established in creation is reaffirmed in the redemption of the human race. Adam is the man. Jesus is the man. The man represents both men and women.

Jesus confirms the office of Adam. Mary confirms the office of Eve. She says to Gabriel, that is, to the God who sent him, “Let it be unto me according to your word.” “According to your word” means receiving God’s

word. She receives the incarnate God in her womb. She receives him through faith. This is a picture for every Christian woman. Mary's words of faith encourage every Christian wife of every Christian husband to look up on the fruit of her womb as a gift from her loving God who gives us children because he loves children and he loves us. The so called equality of the sexes displaces the primacy of the mother's role in the home with a cheap imitation.

God made Adam first. Then he made Eve out of his rib. God gave his command to Adam and Adam, as God's spokesman, passed it on to Eve. God blessed Adam and Eve with children. The first word of blessing after he created them was the blessing of a fruitful womb. Adam called his wife the mother of all the living. Clearly, it is as wife and mother that the first woman, the woman made in the image of God, was to find her womanly fulfillment. It was as Adam's wife and as the mother of the children with which God blessed them that Eve was blessed.

It is not nostalgia for the past that prompts the conviction that the office of motherhood is the highest office a Christian woman can attain. It is not a sentimental attachment to the joys that little children bring. It is the clear Scriptures that compel this conclusion. St. Paul makes this clear in his First Epistle to Timothy, right after saying that a woman may not teach or have authority over men in the church. Paul grounds this prohibition in the order of creation. Adam was formed first, and then Eve. He mentioned as well that Eve was deceived by the devil. He then says something that many have found puzzling, but in fact is quite illuminating, and serves to clarify that motherhood is indeed the highest vocation to which a woman can aspire. St. Paul writes:

Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. 1 Timothy 2:15

What does this mean: "she will be saved in childbearing"? Adam and Eve were both saved by God from the sin they committed and they were saved with the same salvation. The seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. The Virgin Mary's innocent Child would replace Adam's disobedience with his obedience. This saved them both. God saved them both from a futile life of eating, drinking, awaking, sleeping, walking, talking, getting old, and dying. He saved them from the ravages of time.

He saved them, not by rapturing them out of this world, but he saved them within the contexts of their individual lives in this world. A woman is not a man and a man is not a woman. When God saved Eve he saved a woman. He didn't save a sexless creature. She was a woman. He saved her through childbearing. He didn't save her because she gave birth to children. He saved her as she gave birth to children, as she fulfilled the office he established for her in creation. He saved her. He sanctified marriage and childbearing. The birth of Jesus of the Virgin Mary shows this to be so. Mary is the icon for the church because she is the second Eve, who was the mother of all the living. Eve and her daughters are saved through childbearing. Mary and all her Christian daughters and sisters are saved by the Child Mary bore. Childbearing is thus sanctified above all other services.

Fatherhood and motherhood are grounded in creation, the perfect creation, the creation reported by Moses in the Holy Scriptures that he wrote under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The historicity of Adam and Eve means that the human race did not and could not evolve from some lower primate as evolutionists imagine. If their doctrine is true, ours is false. If creation doesn't establish the ordering of the husband as the father and head of the home and the wife as the mother and bearer and nurturer of children, then what does establish this? Only custom, only tradition, only a social construct that can be deconstructed as easily as the English language can be altered to conform to the latest enthusiasm.

Marriage and the family are what God made them to be when he created our first parents in his image and blessed them with children. When the God who created us and loves us and knows better than all of the social scientists put together what is best and most fulfilling for us chose to reveal to his servant Moses what to write down in the beginning of his first book, he said nothing about sexual equality, nothing about a woman's fulfillment in pursuing her personal goals or in discovering her inner purpose. In fact, when Eve looked inward and away from the external word given to her by God through Adam, she was deceived. That deception stands as a warning to us all. You follow your heart and you're lost.

Everything Moses records about the woman – her creation, her fall, God’s verdict upon her sin, God’s promise, and Adam’s confidence in that promise demonstrated by the name he gave her – everything God through Moses wrote about Eve pertained to her office as wife and mother. She is made in the image of God and is immediately blessed with the promise of a fruitful womb. God takes her from Adam’s side and brings her to Adam to be his wife. When she sins, the blessing of children is marred by pain and her wifely relationship to Adam is marred by a desire to rule over him when it is he who will rule over her. She is taken from Adam’s side and is brought to Adam to be his wife. After God clothes Adam and Eve in animal skins prepared for them by the shedding of blood, thus typifying the blood that would be shed on Calvary to take away all their sin, the woman is given the name that means mother of all the living.

It is God who has established the office of wife and mother as the highest office a woman can attain in this life. Why then, is this office denigrated as insufficient, as placing a woman into an inferior position, as degrading, with the headship of the man as a burden? It is because the God who created them male and female has been rejected, if not explicitly in open denial, then implicitly by ignoring his creation as having any relevance to our lives.

The historicity of the account in Genesis of the creation and fall of our first parents is the essential foundation for us Christian men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers to enjoy the blessings of marriage and the family as God intended for us.

It was my privilege to speak at a conference earlier this summer on the topic of raising children in the truth sponsored by the Consortium for Classical Lutheran Education. Classical education follows a threefold process that begins with grammar, proceeds from grammar to logic, and from logic to rhetoric. First, children learn the grammar. They learn what is. Then they learn logic. They learn how this relates to that. Then they learn rhetoric. They learn how to talk about it.

My son John suggested to me that this threefold distinction is helpful in understanding the work of our Triune God. I agree with him. The Father gives us the grammar. The Son gives us the logic. The Holy Spirit gives us the rhetoric. The Father in creation establishes what is. Christ in redemption brings the fallen creation back to where everything relates to everything else properly. The Holy Spirit in sanctification talks about this and by his taking brings to us the fruit of Christ’s redemption.

The failure of modern education is determined at the outset where children are encouraged to engage in rhetoric before they have learned grammar and logic. They are encouraged to talk about what they do not know. So it is with our discussions about marriage and the family. Until we understand the facts – the facts established in creation – we cannot know how to understand how these facts are brought back into harmony, and we certainly cannot speak intelligently about them.

We must first affirm creation. The Christian husband and wife look at Adam and Eve, not as historical curiosities, or examples to follow, or as religious drama to inspire, but as God’s establishment of marriage and the family in the created order. Redemption and sanctification confirm the goodness of creation.

Let us bring this down to earth and apply it to our life together in the church. As we do so, permit me to make this a little personal. It is impossible to talk about marriage and children without talking personally. Just as God did not teach us an abstract doctrine about marriage and the family, but introduced us to individual human beings named Adam and Eve and taught us by how he dealt with them, we must treat marriage and the family according to how these divine institutions exist here and now.

The so called clergy have let us down. As they were bickering over women’s suffrage – whether women should be permitted to vote at a congregation’s voter’s assembly – they were ignoring what was happening in the Christian home. Caught flat footed by the feminist assault, the Missouri Synod adopted women’s suffrage in 1969. It was not because new exegetical studies found that the texts they had used prohibiting this practice actually said nothing about it and referred rather to women not serving as pastors. We already knew that. No, the CTCR report on women’s suffrage of 1968 was written to provide theological cover for a position they had already decided to adopt. The conservative reaction against the Missouri Synod’s decision to permit women’s suf-

frage continued for a couple of decades or so and eventually faded away so that today a small minority of pastors oppose the practice and a small minority of congregations do not permit it.

The debate about women's suffrage moved from suffrage into other matters. Which offices in a congregation could a woman hold? What about serving as an usher, a reader of the Scripture lessons during the divine service, a teacher of Bible classes, a contributor to devotional books, or to theological journals of seminaries, or as speakers at conferences that pastors attend to receive ongoing theological education? Yes, the slope was very slippery.

Our friends in the Wisconsin Synod argued that women's suffrage was the camel's nose in the tent that would inevitably lead to women's ordination. This has not happened, but within Missouri today the pastoral office that the Synod says is denied to women has been become smaller and smaller so as to consist in little more than certain liturgical functions. Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that the charge of sacerdotalism has been leveled against us. It appears that a woman can do anything a man can do except wear a stole, consecrate the elements, and preach the sermon from the pulpit. How we actually differ from Rome is unclear.

The alarm among conservatives about women's suffrage was not alarmist. It was well grounded. It is not that suffrage was a defining issue for the church. It was not and it is not. Most of what voters' assemblies do is not that important. Rather, conservatives were alarmed that the democratic spirit had replaced the order of creation in the thinking of the church's leading theologians. Missouri was not going to stand against the culture. She sowed the wind and she is reaping the whirlwind. There was a domino effect.

But I am not talking about women suffrage. I am talking about marriage and the family.

The Christian home is not a democracy. It is a theocracy. God governs the home. His government is exercised through the father. The father serves his family. He teaches his wife and children the word of God. God said through Moses as recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9,

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates.

The father talks to the wife and the children about what God says. He talks theology to his children. He is their pastor. He leads the family in prayers and in family devotions. He teaches the children to pray. He requires them to attend church. In every aspect of their lives together as a family he serves as God's representative to his wife and children. His children are a heritage from the LORD God. God gave him his wife and children as blessings of his love.

The children are precious. God made them, redeemed them, and sanctifies them. The Christian mother teaches her children the word of God. She sings to them, she prays with them, she reads Bible stories to them.

In our home, I led the family devotions after dinner at the kitchen table. We read from the Bible, sang good Lutheran hymns, sang the Lord's Prayer together, and talked theology. My wife prayed with the children when she put them to bed at night and sang the same hymns we sang around the dinner table. I did not ask her to. Nobody told her to. They were God's children and God gave them to her. She loved them as God's gifts to her. The most precious gift God gave her was his holy word. This is what she wanted to give to her children.

Mothers teach children how to honor their fathers by showing their husbands respect. Fathers do the same. Husband and wife teach children what a father and mother are and how they are to be treated. A woman who criticizes her husband, especially in front of her children, despises herself. She devalues her office as wife and mother. A woman who refuses to put her husband down is not a weak woman. She's a Christian woman. She loves her family and she won't suffer mistreatment of the representative of the family. An attack on Dad is an attack on Mom and all the children.

The father teaches the children about the fatherhood of God by showing love to their mother and treating her as someone he cherishes. He doesn't pick at her faults, but covers them up. The blood of Jesus washes away all our sin. The Christian husband doesn't pretend that his wife is holy. He knows she is holy. She is holy because she is washed in the blood of the Lamb. She is justified by the divine imputation of Christ's righteousness to her. And not only she, but all the children are holy as well, justified by God's blood.

The authority of Mom and Dad is the authority of both law and gospel. Legal authority is oppressive if it stands alone. The gospel of the forgiveness of sins must be taught. As a former seminary professor of mine would say, "All theology is Christology." We speak the gospel. We talk about it. And we express our confidence in it by forgiving one another. In a Christian home, the father and the mother forgive each other. They forgive their children. They live under grace and their lives are defined by it.

They exercise legal authority as well. On this point, permit me to use my wife as an example of how to do this. Boys, as you know, enter into a stage of life when they think they don't have to listen to or honor their mother. Mothers and fathers need to teach them otherwise. My wife had a standard lecture she gave to her sons. She said, "There is only one woman in the world that you should ever take orders from and that is me. I am your mother and you will do what I tell you." My wife is no feminist. She is a woman who commands respect. Only after learning respect for your mother, can a young man or a young woman enter into marriage and honor it as the holy estate God established. Husbands and fathers and wives and mothers are prepared to enter into these God-ordained vocations by learning first to submit in humility to their mother.

The father's sacred duty is to ensure this. To require his children to respect his wife is what love requires of him. When the father does this, he teaches his children that God treasures and values motherhood as a wonderful calling.

What the mother of the children does in the home is more valuable than what the woman does outside of the home. I do not denigrate the lives and vocations of women who are not married with children when I say this. I simply echo what the Bible says at the very beginning when God established the foundation for human society. The office of wife and mother must be protected, supported, encouraged, and loved.

The culture of planned barrenness sees children as a burden and not a blessing. Children are measured by the cost to raise them and become commodities like anything else one buys and sells. No wonder it is legal to kill them before they are born. Who can afford them?

The sound biblical theology of creation has been replaced with the poisonous spirit of democracy. Politics reigns. How will people view us if we don't open more doors to women, more opportunities for women to serve? How about promoting instead the service of women to their husbands and to the fruit of their womb? Or is the self-fulfillment of women more precious than the children God brings into this world?

Placing women into positions in the church where they are publicly teaching what passes for theology to men is done to give these women status. Give them churchly status, academic status, public status, and this will convince our godless critics that we aren't nearly as sexist as they might think.

I have a better idea. Let us return to our historic roots within the clear teaching of the verbally inspired and inerrant written word of God. Let us claim the history of Adam and Eve as our own. Rejoice in God's creation of man, woman, marriage, and the blessing of children. Repent with them as we confess our sins to God. Rejoice with them in the forgiveness of sins and salvation given to us in Christ the promised Seed. Extoll the office of Christian father and the office of Christian mother for the sake of Christian children. And when the culture tells us to conform to its enthusiasms, we say to hell with a godless culture that denigrates the wife and the mother and thereby attacks our God and Father. Instead of bowing to the sterile values of this corrupt culture, we offer the world something infinitely better. We confess the gospel of the Son who received his divinity from his Father in eternity and his humanity from his mother Mary in time. From that sacred birth, we tell the world that motherhood is as high a vocation as God ever gave to a woman, and to the woman who knows this, believes, this, and acts on this, God will reveal his blessing in time and in eternity.